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ABSTRACT

This unit's multidisciplinary approach is well-suited to students in grades 7 through 9. "Life in Japan" is a unit of "Today's Japan": Learning Environment's three level series on Japanese culture. This resource is designed to help teachers with this effort. The program was developed in consultation with classroom teachers by a team of editors, writers, and designers active in U.S. educational publishing. This resource unit is designed to help teenagers gain a better understanding of Japanese people in the 1990s and the unique and dynamic culture that shapes their lives. Students will read an article on "Life in Japan" and learn of schooling of students their own age. Three lessons form the basis of the unit: (1) "Where the Japanese People Live"; (2) "Education for Democracy"; and (3) "What Some Japanese Writers Say." Additional resources are listed for future reference. (EH)

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Life in Japan
A Culture Studies Unit for Grades 7-9
Today's Japan

Learning Enrichment, Inc.

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Today's Japan

T E A C H E R ' S G U I D E

Life in Japan

A Culture Studies Unit for Grades 7-9

Student Materials in This Unit

"Life in Japan" provides an enjoyable way for students to explore the lives of their Japanese contemporaries. Items for student use include a two-sided classroom wall poster; 30 copies of a student article; and three duplicatible exercises.

Curriculum Ties

"Life in Japan" is an ideal supplement for courses on world cultures, regional studies, world geography, world history, and Japanese language. You can easily adapt the student article and two of the duplicatibles for language arts.

Learning Objectives

The unit aims to broaden and intensify young Americans' understanding of Japanese culture. Students using these materials should be able:

- to state, in their own words, the meaning of the term *culture*;
- to apply their definition of culture to Japan, giving examples of how the Japanese express themselves culturally;
- to identify geographic influences on the shaping of Japan's culture;
- to cite at least two principles that guide Japan's education system;
- to analyze cultural viewpoints in samples of Japanese literature;
- to compare their cultural outlook with that of a Japanese teenager, given a story about a fictional Japanese boy.

Introducing the Unit

Who are the Japanese? What are their various views of life? What is it like to be a Japanese teenager today? Tell students that this unit will help them answer those and other questions about the world's seventh most populous nation.

One possible approach:

- **Display the wall poster.** Show students *Side A* of the poster, "Faces of Japan." Read the short copy, then invite students to speculate on what these photos might reveal about Japanese culture.

Side B, "A Profile of Two Cultures," begins with a lesson in comparative geography. After reading "Comparing Populations" aloud, encourage students to speculate: "How could the Japanese people, with so few resources and so little land, have become a major world producer, second only to the United States?"

- **Clarify terms.** Though most of the following terms are defined in context, you might want to preview them. In the article and captions: *bullet train, corporation, discipline, emigrated, routine, self-sufficient, university*. In the duplicatibles: *archipelago, attitude, characteristics, concentration, constitution, environment, infinity, material success, meditating, moors, unearth*.
- **Explain italicized words in the student article.** Explain that the story contains many facts about Japan and its people today, although its characters are both fictional and unique. Japanese terms appear in italics. An explanation—for example, "*tonkatsu*, fried pork cutlets"—usually follows each term.

Student Article

"Life in Japan" introduces a 14-year-old ninth-grader in Tokyo, his family, and some of the people he meets on a spring weekend.

Dear Educator,

Most children accept diversity and even embrace it—until they enter their teens. Then, without realizing it, many teenagers let stereotypical thinking distort their vision of the world. They need your guidance to recognize these tendencies and counter them with knowledge and understanding of others.

"Life in Japan"—a unit of *Today's Japan*, Learning Enrichment's three-level series on Japanese culture—is designed to help you with this effort. The series focuses on Japanese people in the 1990s and on the unique and dynamic culture that shapes their lives.

You will find this unit's multidisciplinary approach well suited to students in Grades 7-9. The program was developed in consultation with classroom teachers by a team of editors, writers, and designers active in U.S. educational publishing. We would like to thank the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership for their support in underwriting the series.

We hope you enjoy "Life in Japan" and share it with colleagues. Please let us know (by way of the enclosed business reply card) how well the material works for you.

Thank you.

Clayton C. Westland
Program Director
Learning Enrichment, Inc.

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Students should not assume that Kenichi's experiences typify those of all Japanese 14-year-olds. For one thing, his anxiety about university acceptance sets him apart from the nearly two thirds of all teenagers who won't attend a four-year university.

Information about each section of the story follows.

"Meeting Kenichi"

Kenichi leaves school after some late clean-up chores and realizes he has to hurry to make baseball practice. In his haste, he almost knocks down his principal.

• **Context.** This segment places Kenichi in three key contexts. Like his peers, he's a student with obligations to his classmates (and classroom). He's a member of a sports team. And he has an acute sense of his place in society, implied by his deference to his principal.

• **Additional background.** Kenichi's deference to Mr. Ito is evident in the way he frames his apology. There are four levels of politeness in Japanese speech, ranging from very polite (level 4) to direct (level 2) and condescending (level 1). Kenichi's "*Shitsurei shimashita*" is at level 3—the level of an ordinary courtesy.

Japan's school year runs from April 1 to March 31, with summer vacation in August. Junior and senior high school each last three years.

"Pressure, Pressure"

Pedaling fast to baseball practice, Kenichi recalls pressures to prepare for high school entrance exams at a *juku*, a private after-school program, to position himself for a top university and career.

• **Context.** For most young Japanese, the path through school to career is more complex and varied than our story can cover. Still, Kenichi's experience is true for many Japanese boys—and, increasingly, girls—whose parents press them to aim high. Despite much change, male and female youths tend to move along separate tracks in Japan—a destiny that, increasingly, many young Japanese women are resisting.

• **Additional background.** Test-preparation *juku* are only one of three types of private, for-profit after-school programs in Japan. Others teach non-academic subjects such as calligraphy, music and sports, especially to younger students. A third type of *juku* supplies remedial or supplementary help in academic areas.

"A Conflict of Goals"

Kenichi ponders his dilemma. *Juku* classes would conflict with baseball practice, forcing him to quit the team.

• **Context.** To many Japanese, baseball (*besuboru*) is more than a sport. During the 1920s, Suishu Tobita, a Japanese guru of baseball, urged players to practice self-discipline in order "to attain the truth, just as in Zen Buddhism." Japan's most popular sporting event, held twice a year near Osaka, is *koko-yakyu*, a high school baseball tournament.

• **Additional background.** Zen Buddhism was introduced to Japan from China during the late 1100s and early 1200s. Stressing self-reliance in the search for salvation through self-discipline and meditation, Zen still shapes Japanese culture.

"A Holiday"

Kenichi's father, mother, and five-year-old sister, Yoko, are introduced. On a rare free Saturday morning, they drive to a gathering at the home of Kenichi's paternal grandparents.

• **Context.** Kenichi's family provides insights into daily life—where they live, what they eat for breakfast—and a glimpse of their neighborhood.

• **Additional background.** Tokyo is a city of thousands of former villages. Some, like Tsukudajima—known for its salted, smoked, and pickled fish—have kept their historic identities.

"History Lessons"

In the car, Kenichi learns that his cousin Shiro is bringing an American friend to the family gathering. His mother fears the American's presence will prompt her father-in-law to dwell on his favorite topic, World War II. As they drive through the heart of Tokyo, they pass near the Imperial Palace, and Kenichi thinks about Japan's government.

• **Context.** The discomfort Kenichi's mother feels about her father-in-law's talk of the "old days" would be shared by many members of her postwar generation. Unlike their parents, these people grew up in a democracy, in relative comfort, and passed through an educational system that emphasized Japan's peaceful role in the world. Indeed, Article 9 of Japan's current constitution rejects the use or threat of force in foreign affairs and prohibits offensive military forces.

To many Japanese, Princess Masako, the former diplomat who married Crown Prince Naruhito in 1993, represents an even newer generation—one committed to an international outlook. Since 1987, Japan has initiated curriculum reforms that include, among other goals, providing all students with broad international understanding.

• **Additional background.** Emperor Akihito has no power in Japan's government. "The Emperor," says Japan's postwar constitution, "shall be the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people, deriving his position from the will of the people with whom resides sovereign power." The constitution, which set up the bicameral Diet, also guarantees basic human and civil rights to all Japanese.

"A Feast!"

Kenichi's grandparents have prepared a wonderful meal. They have invited Carlos, cousin Shiro's American friend, to dine with them.

• **Context.** From Kenichi's Swatch watch to expressways, readers have encountered many "modern" touches in Japanese life. Here they discover that traditional ways are still honored in Japan.

• **Additional background.** Rice farming, Japan's major agricultural industry for centuries, has been hailed for its profound influence on Japanese culture. According to the *Encyclopedia of Japan*, "Rice cultivation . . . requires intense periods of cooperation by all members of the community. This work method became the foundation of the Japanese social structure."

"A Peaceful Moment"

After dinner, everyone gathers on the veranda. Carlos mentions visiting the Peace Memorial Museum in Hiroshima, where the atomic bomb was dropped in 1945. The conversation turns toward talk of peace, pleasing Kenichi's mother.

Resources

Though recommended for educators, the starred (*) sources may be suitable for your students.

Befu, Harumi. *Japan: An Anthropological Introduction.* HarperCollins. 1971. *

Christopher, Robert C. *The Japanese Mind: The Goliath Explained.* Fawcett Columbine. 1984. *

Hersey, John. *Hiroshima.* Knopf. 1946. *

Hettinger, E., compiler. *Springs of Japanese Wisdom.* CH-St. Gallen, Switzerland: Leobuchhandlung. 1988.

Japan 1994: An International Comparison. Tokyo: Keizai Koho Center. December 1993.

Mangajin: A Magazine of Japanese Pop Culture & Language Learning. Info., Sample: Box 7119, Marietta, GA 30065-1119.*

Nakane, Chie. *Japanese Society.* Pelican. 1970.

Perkins, Dorothy. *Encyclopedia of Japan.* Facts on File. 1991.

Saga, Junichi. *Memories of Silk and Straw.* Kodansha International. 1987.

Shiffert, Edith Marcombe, and Sawa, Yuki, trans. *Anthology of Modern Japanese Poetry.* Charles Tuttle. 1972. *

White, Merry. *The Material Child.* The Free Press. 1993.

• **Context.** World War II remains a sensitive issue in Japan. Soon after the "Pacific War," as it is called in Japan, most Japanese disavowed the military leaders who had been in power before and during the war. In large part this shift was a reaction to the devastating destruction and loss of life that occurred during the war.

• **Additional background.** Uncertainty within Japan over how to frame the subject of World War II is reflected in the nation's textbooks, which generally say little about Japan's role in the Asian sector of the war.

"A Surprising Talk"

The next morning Kenichi goes on a hike with his cousins and Carlos. He is astonished by Shiro's complaints about *juku* and the emphasis that older Japanese place on long hours of work. Maki, Kenichi's female cousin, disagrees with Shiro. Kenichi is unable to make a decision about *juku* before his father says they have to start home.

• **Context.** This conversation will help students understand the way cultural attitudes are changing in Japan today. During a period of unprecedented prosperity, young people are questioning the older generation's acceptance of grueling work for the good of the company or community. At the same time, Japanese educators and business leaders question their educational system's emphasis on rote learning.

"The Return Trip"

Returning to Tokyo, Kenichi's mother gives him a present from his grandmother. It is a watercolor with a poem. "No door leads to happiness or unhappiness," the poem reads. "Both enter in when you ask them." Kenichi begins to think of his responsibility to his family. Gradually he understands what decision he will make, though the reader is never told.

• **Context.** With the possible exception of his baseball coach, most of the people in Kenichi's life have resorted to persuasion and indirection when dealing with him. His grandmother is no exception. Teaching by maxim is typical of traditional Japan.

• **Additional background.** For other examples of such subtlety, see the Japanese writing samples in Exercise 3.

Follow-up Activities

The "Dear Reader" exercise should be a useful follow-up to reading this story. Try these steps first:

• **"The last act."** Encourage students to complete Kenichi's story, beginning with these words: "On the following evening, Kenichi and his mother had a talk. Kenichi told her what he wanted to do about *juku*. . . ."

• **Discussion.** To review students' versions of "the last act," break your group into small teams and have them share and comment on one another's "last-act" copy. Then encourage them, in a whole-class setting, to discuss the questions in the "Dear Reader" box. Help them identify questions they may have about Japan. These can be the basis for ongoing research.

Duplicatible Exercises, Pages 4-6. Use the duplicatible exercises to launch, reinforce, or extend your unit on Japan.

"Where the Japanese People Live" (Page 4). This geographic-demographic exercise complements Side B of the poster. Before introducing it, be sure students can locate Japan on a world map or globe.

• **Answers.** 1-c. 2-a. 3-c. 4-a. 5-b. 6-a. 7-c. 8-Using clues throughout the page, students should be able to assume that Japan has at least soil, wood, and fish. Thus, they might imagine farming, fishing, seafaring, hunting and trapping (at least for small animals), food preparation (as a service), wood-cutting, housing construction, wood carving, pottery making, the fashioning of garments, dyeing (with the use of plant pigments), and—most essential to people without many resources—trading. 9-Self-reliance, inventiveness, a strong sense of a single shared culture, self-discipline in times of need, and a feeling of vulnerability to external threats, leading in some cases to defensiveness. 10-Answers will vary. They might range from encouraging a sense of curiosity about new ways to use fuels, to tolerating a wasteful use of resources.

"Education for Democracy" (Page 5). This duplicatible offers students an opportunity for a hands-on experience with excerpted primary sources: the U.N.'s Declaration of Human Rights (1948); Japan's constitution (1947); and Japan's Fundamental Law of Education (1947), which set up the U.S.-style 6-3-3-4 system of schooling and extended compulsory education to nine years.

• **Answers.** 1-True. 2-True. 3-False. 4-False. 5-True. 6-True. **Write On:** 1. Answers will vary. 2. Answers will vary, although you will want students to point out the link that Japanese law implies between "equal education" and "free education." Indeed, Japan's constitution refers to "the right to . . . equal education correspondent to . . . ability," not to the level of family income. If the fee-charging *juku* give children an edge in school and in exams (and it is not at all clear that they do), some Japanese fear that they could compromise Japan's ideal of equal education for all—an ideal of which the Japanese are justly proud.

"What Some Japanese Writers Say" (Page 6). You might want to invite an English teacher to work with you in helping students explore these writing samples, some of which can be difficult.

• **Answers.** 1a-In "A," the term "man's *space* on Earth" refers to a concept that Americans might render as "man's *time* on Earth." The difference between the two words is an important clue to the difference between the Japanese and the U.S. cultural views of life. 1b-"The nail that sticks up" is a familiar Japanese metaphor for a person who stands out as different from others in his or her group. U.S. teenagers reading this might reflect on their own feelings about peer pressure. 1c-"My past" signifies "My personal memory and (later) my understanding of my connection to earlier life on Earth." A sense of history is extremely important in the Japanese culture. 2-People who pass by nature so busily that they fail to see its underlying beauty—and thus render nature's "voice" "inaudible." 3 to 6-Answers will vary. In discussing Question 4, help students see that the "place" the writer refers to could be an organization or even a computer forum in which all peoples might feel free to express themselves culturally.

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Let Us Hear from You

The LE staff would like to know how well this unit works for you and your students. You can tell us by taking a few moments to fill out and return the enclosed Business Reply Card (BRC). Your feedback will help us prepare future materials.

Please return the BRC today!

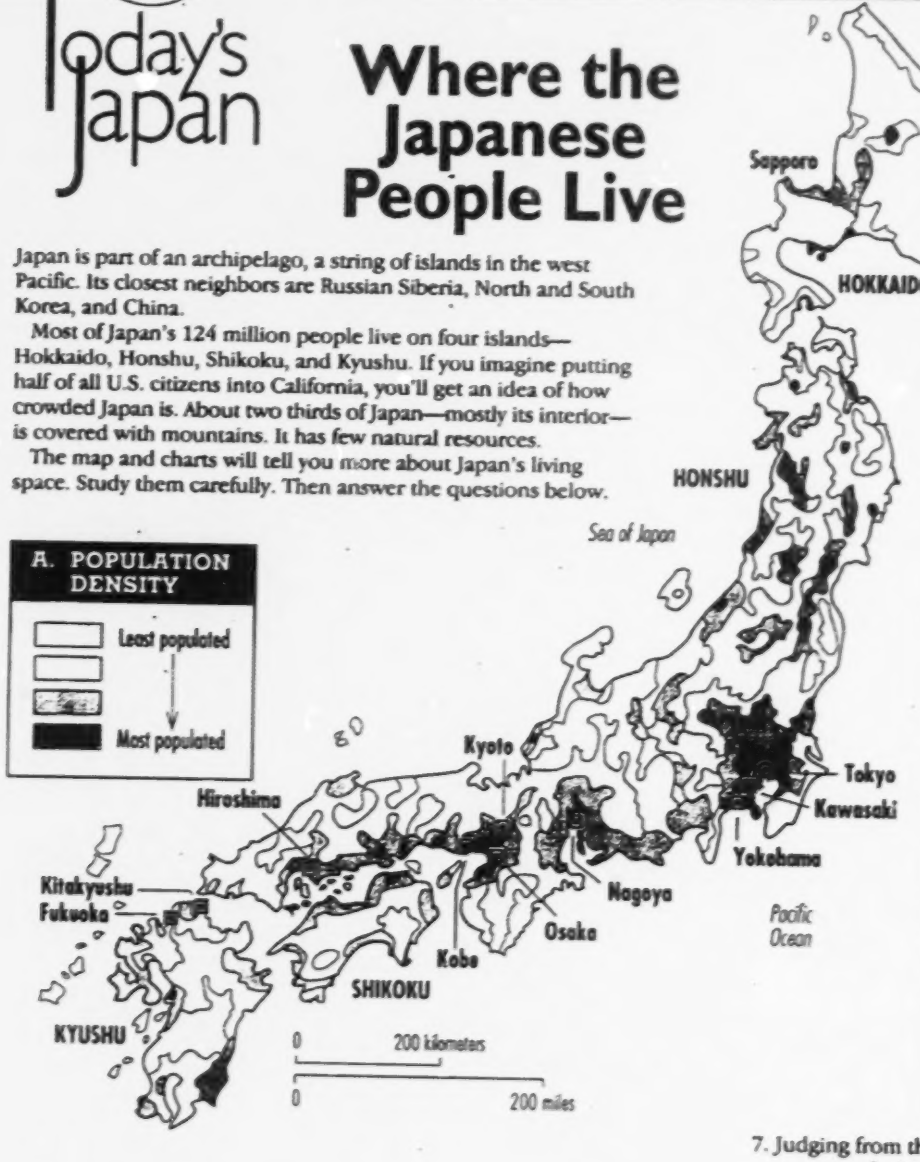
Today's Japan

Where the Japanese People Live

Japan is part of an archipelago, a string of islands in the west Pacific. Its closest neighbors are Russian Siberia, North and South Korea, and China.

Most of Japan's 124 million people live on four islands—Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu. If you imagine putting half of all U.S. citizens into California, you'll get an idea of how crowded Japan is. About two thirds of Japan—mostly its interior—is covered with mountains. It has few natural resources.

The map and charts will tell you more about Japan's living space. Study them carefully. Then answer the questions below.



A. POPULATION DENSITY

Least populated

Most populated

B. MAJOR JAPANESE CITIES

City	Population
1. Tokyo (23 wards)	7,927,000
2. Yokohama	3,250,000
3. Osaka	2,495,000
4. Nagoya	2,095,000
5. Sapporo	1,704,000
6. Kobe	1,468,000
7. Kyoto	1,395,000
8. Fukuoka	1,214,000
9. Kawasaki	1,167,000
10. Hiroshima	1,072,000
11. Kitakyushu	1,015,000

Source: Japan Ministry of Home Affairs

Shirley Horn Graphics

C. LAND USE IN JAPAN

Land Use	Share of Total Acres
Woodlands	66.8%
Agriculture	14.0%
Dwellings	4.3%
Rivers	3.5%
Roads	3.0%
Moors	0.7%
Other	7.6%
Total	99.9%

Source: Japan National Land Agency

1. What body of water lies west of Japan? (a) Pacific Ocean; (b) Gulf of Mexico; (c) Sea of Japan
2. In what direction would a plane fly, going from Tokyo to Sapporo? (a) NNE; (b) SE; (c) NNW
3. About how many kilometers separate Hiroshima from Kawasaki? (a) 250 km; (b) 450 km; (c) 600 km
4. On what island are most of Japan's largest cities concentrated? (a) Honshu; (b) Hokkaido; (c) Kyushu
5. In 1992, Japan's population was about 124 million. About what percentage of its people lived in the cities shown on the map? (a) 5%; (b) 20%; (c) 60%
6. The area of Japan is 377,835 sq km. Roughly how much is covered by farms? (a) 50,000 sq km; (b) 15,000 sq km; (c) 5,000 sq km
7. Judging from the map and chart, where would you expect to find Japan's woodlands? (a) mostly on Kyushu; (b) mostly on Honshu's southern coast; (c) throughout all the islands.
8. Let the facts on this page help you imagine the work Japan's inhabitants might have done about 2,000 years ago, when farming was relatively new. On the back of this sheet, suggest 10 possible early occupations.
9. The Japanese often speak of *shimaguni ikonjo*, or "island mentality"—the way their environment shapes their outlook and actions. On the back of this sheet, suggest three character traits you'd expect an island setting like Japan's to nurture.
10. Geography affects U.S. thinking, too. Until the 1970's, for example, Americans felt the U.S. would never need much imported oil. On the back of this sheet, suggest how this idea may have shaped the way Americans view energy.

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Today's Japan

DUPLICATIBLE TWO

Education for Democracy

Japan's current constitution took effect in 1947. That same year, Japan's Fundamental Law of Education set up the system of education that is in effect in Japan today.

Both documents reflect ideas spelled out in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Adopted in 1948, this statement of basic rights and freedoms was written in 1946, 10 years before Japan joined the U.N.

Excerpts from the three documents appear on this page. What do they tell you about Japan and the role the Japanese believe education should play in promoting its citizens' rights? To find out, read them and answer the questions below.

From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Article 26: 1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. . . . 2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the U.N. for the maintenance of peace.

From Japan's Constitution (1947)

Article 26: All people shall have the right to receive an equal education correspondent to their ability, as provided by law. All people shall be obligated to have all boys and girls under their protection receive ordinary education as provided for by law. Such compulsory education shall be free.

From Japan's Fundamental Law of Education (1947)

Article 1: Education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the people, sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual value, respect labor and have a deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with independent spirit, as builders of the peaceful state and society.

Article 8: The political knowledge necessary for intelligent citizenship shall be valued in education. The schools prescribed by law shall refrain from political education or other political activities for or against any specific political party.

Article 9: The attitude of religious tolerance and the position of religion in social life shall be valued in education. The schools established by the state and local public bodies shall refrain from religious education or other activities for a specific religion.

Sources: *School Education in Japan*, by Ishizaka Kazuo; and *The World Book*.

Check True (T), False (F), or Can't Tell (C):

❑T ❑F ❑C 1. Like the signers of the Declaration of Human Rights, the Japanese believe that basic education should be free.

❑T ❑F ❑C 2. Japanese law shares the U.N. Declaration's view that education should help students develop their special individual qualities—their personalities.

❑T ❑F ❑C 3. Unlike the U.N. Declaration, Japan's laws make no mention of religious tolerance as a goal of education.

❑T ❑F ❑C 4. In Japan, it's legal for public school teachers to promote political parties and candidates in the classroom.

❑T ❑F ❑C 5. Japanese schools can teach students about politics, but only to help them learn to make informed choices as citizens.

❑T ❑F ❑C 6. Like the writers of the U.N. Declaration, those who wrote Japan's education law believed that education should promote peace.

Write On: (1) Explain how your school works to achieve two of the same goals for which Japanese schools strive. (2) Some Japanese see the popular *juku*—private "after-school schools," for which parents must pay—as a threat to equal education. Why do you agree or disagree? Answer on the back of this sheet.

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Today's Japan

DUPLICATIBLE THREE

What Some Japanese Writers Say

One of the best ways to learn about another culture group is to read the works of its poets, essayists, and other writers. Proverbs are also good clues to a people's values. So are advertisements, songs, comic books, and slogans.

The excerpts and quotations on this page are all from Japanese sources—past and present. As you read each, try to imagine a person actually saying such words. What feelings do the words express? What beliefs, complaints, or desires?

Read each item carefully. Then answer the questions below.

B. "The nail that sticks up gets hammered down."
—**Japanese proverb**

A. "Man's space on Earth . . .
A quick hunt for shelter
Before the rain comes down."
—**Japanese proverb**

C. "Do you want to put your mother in an old people's home?"
"Not by the hair of your chinny-chin-chin! . . ."
—**Shotaro Ishinomori, in his manga, comic book, *Japan Inc.***

D. "I started work on my father's boat as soon as I left primary school. Even children had their uses on board: I had to cook the crew's meals. . . .
From the age of twelve or thirteen we were expected to be able to manage any job an adult could do."
—**Hachigoro Yamaguchi, writing about the early 1900s in *Memories of Silk and Straw***

E. "Nature
tells everything in silence
to one that passes by busily
the voice is inaudible
a far green cape
sand over a fence
that's all"
—**"Nature," by Saburo Kuroda, b. 1919**
Anthology of Modern Japanese Poetry

F. "At three / I didn't have a past
At five / my past was to yesterday
At seven / my past was to the age of warriors
At eleven / my past was to dinosaurs
At fourteen / my past was as the textbooks
At sixteen / I watched the infinity of the past with fear
At eighteen / I don't know what time it is"
—**"Growth," by Shuntaro Tanikawa, b. 1931**
Anthology of Modern Japanese Poetry

Sources: A. *Sprigs of Japanese Wisdom*. C. *Japan Inc.* D. *Memories of Silk and Straw*. E and F. *Anthology of Modern Japanese Poetry*. G. *The New York Times*. H. Quoted in *The Connection*, by Jonathan Rauch.

G. "There should be a midway place where we could go to exchange information with people from other cultures. People have to have pride and that pride comes from being able to express yourself freely to other people. The Japanese people have achieved material success all over the world, but they are not speaking to other people culturally, and as a result, they don't get back that feeling of pride in themselves."
—**Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami, in *The New York Times Book Review*, September 27, 1992**

H. "Japan's so small, why are you driving so fast?"
—**Slogan from a police campaign to stop speeding**

Think Again!

On the back of this sheet, write brief answers to the following questions:

1. Find each of these terms, underline them, and think about the way they are used on this page. Explain the meaning of any two: (a) "Man's space"; (b) "The nail that sticks up"; (c) "my past."

2. Saburo Kuroda writes about a person who misses something important in life. Who is that person? Explain.

3. Hachigoro Yamaguchi describes what Japanese adults expected of 12- and 13-year-olds in the early 1900s. In a few sentences, sum up what you think adults in the U.S. expect of teenagers today.

4. Try to imagine a "midway place" that would satisfy Haruki Murakami. Explain how such a "place" would work.

5. Choose the selection you like best from this page. Identify and explain your choice in a few sentences.

6. Explain what at least two of the writers believe important about nature, Japan, or relationships with others. Share your responses with classmates.

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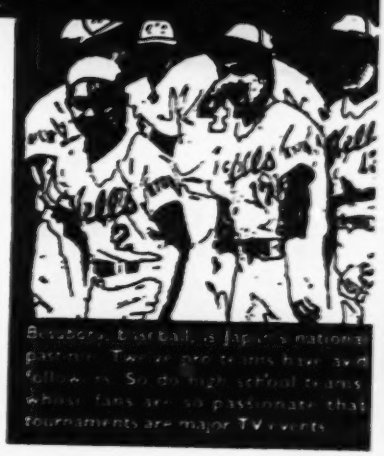
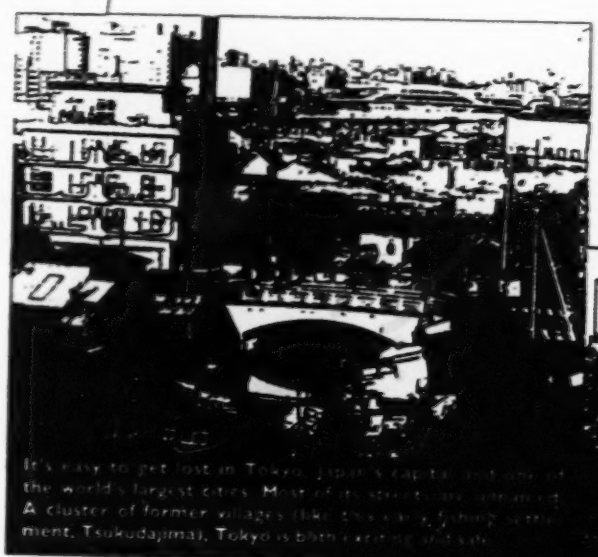
Today's Japan

LIFE IN JAPAN



Basketball, basketball is Japan's national passion. Top pro teams have avid fans. So do high school teams whose fans are so passionate that tournaments are major TV events.



Surrounded by a moat, the Imperial Palace grounds (right) form a quiet 280 acre retreat in Tokyo's heart. Beyond the moat and 350 year-old guardhouse are Shinjuku's skyscrapers. A business district, Shinjuku becomes Tokyo's main night spot at dusk.

Have you ever tried to feel and think exactly like someone else? We can never fully understand another person. Still, the attempt to do so helps us discover how we're like people of other cultures. In this story, you'll meet a fictional boy living in Tokyo, the capital of Japan. Try to imagine being Kenichi, who is 14.

Meeting Kenichi

Kenichi shivered as he left school. Though it was April in Japan—two weeks after the new school year began—it was unusually chilly.

He looked at his Swatch watch and groaned. "Almost four o'clock. If I'm not on time for practice on the school baseball team, I won't get into the game. We should have worked faster cleaning the classroom."

As he raced to get his bike, Kenichi tried to remember the tips his coach had given him at yesterday's batting practice. Lost in thought, he rounded a corner and crashed into Mr. Ito, the principal.

"*Shitsurei shimashita*, Please forgive my rudeness," Kenichi said quickly. He said it again, bowing low with worry. If Mr. Ito kept him from going to baseball practice, the coach would bench him for a month.

"Get your bicycle," said Mr. Ito. "But watch where you're going. You're in ninth grade now. You must think ahead before you act."

Pressure, Pressure

Kenichi kept hearing the principal's words as he pedaled toward the baseball field. Thinking ahead was all he seemed to be doing these days. His mother and father, his teachers—even Mr. Shioji, who owned the fruit store—were all urging him to think ahead. They wanted him to enroll in a local *juku*, one of the private "after-school schools." Many *juku* offer music and art lessons or extra help in academic subjects. But the *juku* his parents wanted

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him to attend prepared students for the entrance exams that each high school gives.

"If you get into a top high school," his father said, "you raise your chances of getting accepted later to a well-respected university. And that will help you move on to a solid career."

"Like most Japanese," Mr. Shioji told Kenichi one day, "I never had the chance to go to a university. "I worked on my parents' rice farm until the 1970s. I was always sorry I couldn't study more. Go to the *juku*, Kenichi. With a good job, you can help out your parents if they need it when they're old."

Nearly half of all junior high students attend juku, private "after-school schools" where they cram for exams with stacks of books like these.

Villages like Tajima, 100 miles north of Tokyo, dot Japan's countryside. F farm families produce nearly all the rice and most of the fruits and vegeta

A Conflict of Goals

Kenichi tried to imagine going to two schools at once. *Juku* classes were held three evenings a week from 5:00 to 9:00, and on Saturdays from 2:00 until 5:00. His cousin, Maki, had gone to a *juku* in ninth grade. With all the homework, she got only five hours of sleep a night.

It wasn't just the idea of extra classes that bothered Kenichi. What really mattered was that he would have to quit the team. He couldn't stay if he didn't show up for practice every day. And he couldn't go to practice if he went to a *juku*.

Baseball meant a lot to Kenichi. He knew the statistics for all his favorite players. A strong hitter, Kenichi dreamed of beating Sadaharu Oh's record of 868 home runs.

Kenichi reached the field just as the lights went on. The team was about to start a pre-practice drill. He bowed low to his coach and took his place on the grass.

"Go for 50 push-ups," the coach yelled. "*Ichi, ni, san, shi*, . . . One, two, three, four. . . ."

A Holiday

The next morning was a rare Saturday for Kenichi's family. His father had the day off, though he usually went to the office on Saturdays. Kenichi had a free day, too. Until recently Japanese students went to school every Saturday morning. But Saturday classes were being phased out. Kenichi now had one Saturday off each month. To make the most of the free time, the family was going to visit Kenichi's grandparents and stay overnight.

After a quick breakfast of *gohan* and *miso-shiru*, steamed rice and bean-paste soup, they headed for their Toyota. Five-year-old Yoko got in clutching her favorite *manga*, comic books.

As the Toyota passed through the narrow streets of their neighborhood, Kenichi's mother spoke up. "Yoko, this part of Tokyo was once a little village," she said. "Most people used bikes to get around."

Now cars crowded the streets. Trains linked all of Tokyo's former "villages" with the central business district, where his father worked.

History Lessons

After a half hour, they reached the expressway and headed north. Tokyo's low, crowded buildings spread as far as the eye could see. The tall buildings in the business district were off to the east.

Kenichi's father relaxed. "The whole family's going to be there—my two brothers, their wives and children," he said. "And my nephew Shiro is bringing a university friend—a student from the U.S."

"An American!" Kenichi's mother told her husband. "Oh, Grandfather is sure to bring up his favorite topic—World War II."

"What if he does?" said her husband. "The war shaped his life. He saw the air raids on Tokyo and lived through the aftermath of the atomic bomb, which affected all of Japan."

"But the war is over," Kenichi's mother said. "Japan and the United States fought 50 years ago. Now we're business partners and friends. I'd rather talk about peace instead of war."

Kenichi's father smiled. "Then we will," he said.

Kenichi's mother looked out the window at a park. "See all the trees, Yoko?" she asked Kenichi's sister. "That's where the Imperial Palace is. That's where Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko live."

"And Princess Masako, too?" Yoko asked.

"Yes," said Kenichi's father. "She and her husband, Crown Prince Naruhito, live in a house near the palace. One day he'll become emperor, and Princess Masako will be empress."

Kenichi's parents always spoke of the Emperor with respect, although he knew the Emperor had no real voice in Japan's democratic government. Men and women elected to the Diet, or legislature, made the nation's laws.

"I like Princess Masako," Yoko said.

"Everybody does," said her mother. "She's very smart. She can speak five languages."

"Can you speak five languages?"

"No," Yoko's mother answered. "But you can if you work hard at school. Girls today have more choices than I did—in education and in jobs. Before she was a princess, Masako studied in the United States and Europe. Then she held an important job at the

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A harbor overlooks the Ise Bay at Nagoya, Japan's fourth largest city and a center of industry. Per person, Japan's output of goods and services is second only to Switzerland's.

Girls break for ice cream in Tokyo. Among teens who can afford it, shopping with friends is a popular pastime—and one that troubles many adults raised in harder times.

...ning mostly part-time. 5 million ...s the Japanese eat.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Learning foreign languages is helpful today for all Japanese, girls and boys."

"Why?" Yoko asked.

"Because Japan is only one of more than 180 nations," her father said. "We must learn how people in other lands live and think."

"Why?" said Yoko.

"So that we can live in harmony with others," said her mother.

Yoko thought about that, as she hummed along with a song playing on the CD. Meanwhile, Kenichi was wondering if Shiro's guest could tell him about the Atlanta Braves.

A Feast!

Kenichi's grandparents lived in the western part of the Kanto plain, one of Japan's rice-farming districts. As the Toyota neared their home, he could see the fields where the rice seedlings would soon be planted.

His grandparents were waiting at the gate. "We're so happy you came," they said. Kenichi's whole family bowed low in respect—Yoko, too. Then uncles and aunts and cousins Shiro and Maki came down the path and greeted everyone.

"This is my friend Carlos from the city of Boston, in the United States," said Shiro. "Carlos is in my computer class at the university. And he speaks Japanese."

Carlos bowed. "I'm so pleased to meet you." He looked at Kenichi's father. "Shiro tells me you are an executive with a trading company that my dad does business with. My father says your company always provides top-quality goods."

"*Arigato*, thank you," said Kenichi's father. "At your age, I never imagined I'd be doing business with a company 8,000 miles away."

Entering the house, everyone exchanged their shoes for *surippa*, slippers. *Tatami*, thick rush mats, carpeted the room where they were to eat. To protect the *tatamii*, the diners left their *surippa* outside the room and walked to the low table in their socks. They sat on the floor and ate with *hashi*, chopsticks.

Grandmother had prepared a feast. The meal started with cups of *chawan-mushi*, steamed egg custard with mushrooms, prawns, and chicken. Cold chicken followed, as did salads with mustard and ginger sauces, and several kinds of *sushi*—including Kenichi's favorite, raw tuna. He loved the *tonkatsu*, fried pork cutlets, and *tempura*, deep-fried fish and vegetables. By the time the last bowl of rice was served, he thought he'd never, ever, have to eat again. But then came the green tea ice cream!

A Peaceful Moment

After dinner, the family sat on the veranda that faced the garden. The only light came from porch lanterns. As people talked in small groups, Yoko fell asleep in her mother's lap. "Carlos," Grandfather asked suddenly, "have you seen much of Japan?"

"I've been busy at the university," Carlos said. "But during the New Year's holiday, Shiro and I took the 'bullet train' to Kyoto—a beautiful city. Buildings like the Shoren-in Buddhist temple put me in touch with Japan's past."

"We also got up to Sapporo for skiing," added Shiro.

"Ah," Carlos said, "but the Peace Memorial Museum at Hiroshima. What destruction the atomic bomb caused there in 1945!"

"Was your grandfather in that war?" Grandmother asked.

"Oh, no," said Carlos. "My grandfather was in Brazil during World War II. That's where he was born. After the war, he moved to the United States and met my grandmother. She was from Ireland. They married,

became U.S. citizens, and moved to Boston."

He thought for a moment. "In high school we had a teacher who said that learning who wins and loses is okay if you're studying baseball, not war. She said the important question with war is, 'How can people prevent it?'"

Grandfather leaned forward to speak, and Kenichi—who perked up at the word *baseball*—saw his mother stiffen. "We Japanese believe that, too," Grandfather said. "After World War II, we worked hard to make the nation peaceful. We will never, ever go to war again. Our constitution forbids it."

Kenichi's mother relaxed and smiled. Inside the house, a clock gently chimed the hour. "Time for sleep," said Grandmother softly.

A Surprising Talk

The next morning, Kenichi, Shiro, Maki, and Carlos hiked through the trees behind his grandparents' home.

"What a beautiful place," said Carlos. "Look at that cherry tree!"

Maki turned to Shiro: "Remember the poem Grandmother taught us? 'For these few days / The hills are bright with cherry blossoms. / Longer, and we should not prize them so.' "

Maki smiled. "That's by the poet Yamabe No Akahito," she said.

"I wish I were as smart as you," said Kenichi. "I wouldn't have to go to *juku* to cram for high school entrance exams."

"I sympathize," said Shiro. "When I was Yoko's age, *juku* meant fun—music lessons and calligraphy. Later, *juku* meant extra help with schoolwork. But the *juku* where I prepared for exams only meant endless memorization of names and dates."

"Now, Shiro," said Maki. "You said you wouldn't have passed your university's entrance exam without the *juku*."

"True," Shiro replied. "But what's my reward when I graduate? If I'm lucky, a big company will put me on salary, and I'll become like our fathers. I'll put in 12 hours a day, six days a week. Some reward!"

"But things are changing," said Maki. "Government offices and businesses are talking about fewer working hours. They'd better. Boys in my class say they'll refuse to work like their fathers. And international companies in Tokyo are offering girls like me good jobs. Shiro, in the long run the *juku* system helps people who want those jobs to get them."

"Can't baseball teach lessons that lead to job success and happiness?" said Carlos.

"Of course it can," said Shiro. "Unfortunately for Kenichi, entrance exams aren't about baseball. Kenichi, what are you going to do?"

"I can answer that," said Kenichi's father, catching up to them. "He's going to get ready to go home. If we don't start now, the traffic will be terrible."

The Return Trip

During the long ride home, Kenichi thought how much he wanted to travel, like Carlos. He wanted to play baseball. But, most of all, he wanted to make his parents proud.

His mother turned around in her seat. "Kenichi," she said, "I almost forgot to give you this present—from Grandmother."

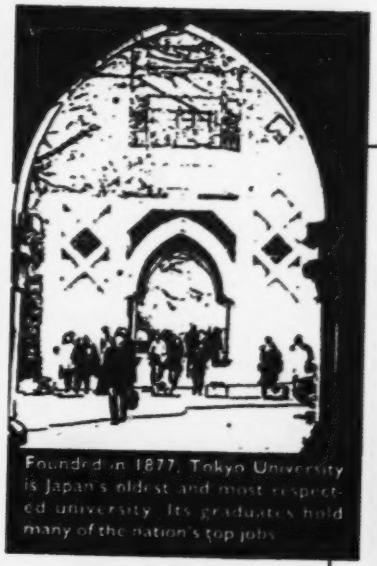
She passed him a framed watercolor of his grandparents' home. On the side, in lovely brush strokes, Grandmother had written: "No door leads to happiness or unhappiness. / Both enter in when you ask them."

As he read the words, Kenichi realized that however much he loved baseball, he could never forget the debt he owed his family. Gradually, he realized what his decision about *juku* would be. . . .

Pronunciation Guide

Romanized Japanese—Japanese spelled out in the Roman alphabet that we use for English—is easy to pronounce.

- Say every *a* like "ah." *Anata* (ahnahtah), you; *hashi* (hahshee), chop sticks.
- Say every *i* like "e." *Ichi* (eechee), one; *ni* (nee), two.
- Say every *u* like "oo." *Juku* (jookoo), "after-school school"; *tempura* (tempoorah), deep-fried fish and vegetables.
- Say every *e* like "eh." *Kenichi* (kehneechee), male's given name; *ogenki de* (oh-gen-kee deh), take care of yourself.
- Say every *o* like "o." *Gohan* (go-hahn), steamed rice; *tonkatsu* (tone-kahtsoo), fried pork cutlets.
- Say *ai* like "eye." *Hokkaido* (hoke-keye-doh), a major island; *hai* (high), yes.
- Say *ei* like "ay." *Sensei* (sen-say), teacher, master; *shitsurei* (sheetsooray), excuse me.
- Consonants: Say them just as you would in English. Among the exceptions are *g*, which is always hard, as in "girl"; and *r*, which sounds like a cross between the pronunciation of *r* and *l* in English.



Founded in 1877, Tokyo University is Japan's oldest and most respected university. Its graduates hold many of the nation's top jobs.

Most Japanese love *manga*, comic magazines, and *onigiri*, fish- or plum-filled rice balls. To the happy eaters in this *manga* excerpt, the man (bottom) says: "*Sasuga ichi-ryū no ryōtei no onigiri da.*" ("Now that's a first-class restaurant's *onigiri*.") Here, Japanese characters are read right to left, down columns.

Dear Reader,

How has Kenichi's life been like—and different from—your own? Keep this question in mind as you answer the following three questions on a separate piece of paper.

(1) What are the chief influences in Kenichi's life?

(2) What goals seem important to him?

(3) What do you think he should do about juku*?*

Explain each answer.

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